DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 119 522 FL 007 526

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TITLE The Teacher of Italian and the Community.
PUB DATE 27 Dec 74
NOTE 13p.; Paper presented at the meeting of the Modern Language Association/American Association of Teachers of Italian (New York, NY, December, 1974)

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.83 HC-$1.67 Plus Postage
DESCRIPTORS *College Language Programs; *Community Involvement; Community Support; *Italian; Italian Americans; Language Enrollment; *Language Instruction; Program Design; *Program Development; *School Community Relationship; Second Language Learning

ABSTRACT

This paper presents a case-study of the successful nine-month plan with which Tulane University guaranteed the growth and continuation of its Italian program. The paper provides a blueprint for the teacher of Italian on any campus who wishes to strengthen the position of his Italian program in this era when dwindling federal, state and university support forces us to look for resources which can come only from the community. The three basic steps in Tulane's program development plan include: (1) attracting the community to the program by means of a guest lecture series, a film festival, and a book exhibit; (2) encouraging community support in the form of book donations, the awarding of fellowships and merit prizes, and other fund-raising activities; and (3) reciprocal efforts by the teacher of Italian to serve the community's needs in the area of instruction. These steps are fully detailed and can be employed without modification by the Italian program of any high school, college or university. (Author/CLK)

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The Teacher of Italian and the Community

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Do you want to guarantee the growth and continuation of your Italian program? I achieved this goal, and you can, too, by similarly establishing a mutually-beneficial relationship between your program and the community.

Through sharing with you the successful method I employed, I hope to provide a blueprint for the teacher of Italian on any campus who wishes to strengthen the position of his Italian program in this era when dwindling Federal, State and University support forces us to look for resources which can come only from the community.

My method resulted from the dire predicament in which I found myself unexpectedly thrust last March. The Italian program I had rapidly developed at Tulane University was doomed to extinction by unforeseen University budget cutbacks. At that time there was no rapport between the Italian program and the community at large and, although there is a considerable Italian-American population in New Orleans, it had virtually no relationship with the Tulane Italian program.

After nine, exciting months this bleak picture has completely changed. The Italian program is thriving and growing even more vigorously because--to our mutual benefit--the people of New Orleans are actively involved in it. The Italian-American community in particular has found a new focus,

pride and unity in participating in the events of our program, and, in fact, has insured its continued growth. They have provided a second position in Italian and are presently establishing a chair in Italian.

Even if your area does not have such an Italian-American population, you can succeed in strengthening your Italian program with the help of your townspeople by following my three-step plan of action which achieved these results at Tulane. Indeed, as teachers of Italian we are extremely fortunate in that the vast and rich Italian heritage holds an immediate interest for virtually every member of the community, regardless of his ethnic origin. I will present my plan and the activities through which I realized each of its fundamental three steps in outline form.

Step I. ATTRACT THE COMMUNITY TO YOUR PROGRAM

Since it is impossible to interest a community in a program they know nothing about, you must attract the community to your program. Do so by carefully planning conspicuous events which at once benefit your students of Italian, your academic community, and your community at large. I have accomplished this goal through these four avenues:

First: A Guest Lecturer Series

The speakers in our lecture series have been the Consul

General of Italy for the Southern United States, who spoke on his role and on modern Italy, Professor Giovanni Cecchetti of U.C.L.A., who explored the nature of poetry, and His Excellency Egidio Ortona, the Ambassador of Italy to the United States, who discussed the economic and political relations between Italy and the U.S. This April Professor Fredi Chiappelli of U.C.L.A. will speak on "Machiavelli In Action."

Attendance at these lectures has averaged 150 people, and the guest lecturer series has been exceedingly inexpensive. The Italian Consul General spoke willingly on our campus without remuneration, as did the Italian Ambassador, whom I asked to speak at Tulane during his official visit to New Orleans. By planning to have Professors Chiappelli and Cecchetti stop to lecture on our campus during one of their lecture tournées, our travel expenses for these internationally-renowned scholars have been kept to a minimum.

Second: An Italian Film Festival

Our film festival consisted of eight movies carefully selected to portray the Italian social evolution from 1900 to the present, to present the finest examples of the Italian film industry, and to demonstrate the major movements of the Italian cinema from its Neorealism of the 1940's to its present focus on modern man. In its entirety this program was designed to benefit students of Italian, history, sociology,

political science and the performing arts and to present as complete and accurate an image as possible of 20th century Italy and her film industry. A brief lecture preceded the showing of each movie and focussed on the particular aspects of Italy and her cinema exemplified by the movie. These are the films which we showed in the following order: Luchino Visconti's La Terra Trema, Vittorio De Sica's The Bicycle Thief, Roberto Rossellini's Open City and Blood on the Balcony, De Sica's Two Women, Michelangelo Antonioni's Red Desert, Federico Fellini's Juliet of the Spirits, and Pier Paolo Pasolini's The Hawks and the Sparrows. The film series was open to the public free of charge, was held on consecutive Thursday evenings at 7:30, and had an attendance which ranged from 150 to a maximum capacity of 500 people. Over half of the audience were members of the community at large, and I have received very enthusiastic letters of appreciation from many of them. I was granted the $800.00 for this film series from the Tulane Graduate Student Council. If you are unable to secure this amount, you could organize a beautiful film series on Italy by utilizing the films provided by the Istituto Italiano di Cultura. You pay only the shipping charge, which amounts to about $6.00 per film.

Third: A Book Exhibit

Ours is planned for this March. It will be a unique

exhibit of 150 new Italian books revealing Italy's vast contributions to the Western World and her innovative publishing industry. The exhibit has been made possible by the Italian Consulate and will be held in the Tulane library. It, too, will be open to the public free of charge.

The fourth avenue through which I have drawn the community to our program is publicity. Advertise your program and its events through every means possible. Use posters displayed throughout the community. Here are some of the posters I have used. The cost is roughly $30.00 per 200 posters. You must also establish good personal relations with the editor of your school newspaper, with the local newspapers, radio and TV stations. When you want to publicize an event, send them a typed copy of the precise information you would like them to communicate to the public. Through this approach all our events have received excellent coverage in the communications media.

Having attracted the community to your program, the second step in the three-step plan of action is

ENCOURAGE COMMUNITY SUPPORT

Spread the word about your program and its need for community support by speaking to individual members of the community and before any and all community groups that will have you. I have stressed the following three needs and have had excel-

lent response from the community.

1. Book Donations

Ask the community to contribute books to your school library. I have encouraged the community members to give their libraries to our University. Consequently, many older citizens who are moving out of their homes into apartments have donated their libraries to us. On each occasion I have had a small gathering and ceremony in the library to thank the donor personally and to present him with a letter of thanks and a copy of the book plate bearing his name as donor which will appear inside the books he contributed. This is a festive occasion, followed by sherry and a wine cake I bake. Through the encouragement of such support for our library, we have acquired 250 volumes which have greatly expanded the range of our University collection. Moreover, we now have a small Friends of the Library Group, and a sampling of the books they have donated will be displayed in a special case in our Italian Book Exhibit.

2. Fellowships and Merit Prizes

Ask community groups if they will contribute merit prizes for your students. As a result of such inquiries the Italian Consulate has established the Italian Government Prize for Excellence in Italian. This award is presented to the top graduating Italian major and consists of a beautiful Italian book. The students and their parents are especially enthusias-

tic about the prize and the special mention the student receives at graduation. Furthermore, we are presently making final arrangements for a community fellowship for graduate study in Italian.

3. Fund-raising Activities

Our fund-raising activities have provided a second professor of Italian, established a chair in Italian and promise even further growth in our program. In fund-raising, I suggest that you first go to the most influential, prominent and respected member of the community and ask if he or she will spearhead your fund-raising drive. I cannot stress strongly enough the importance of seeking the assistance of the most influential members of the community who are willing to undertake your cause. Their contacts and personal influence are invaluable. Having singled out these people, your fund-raising campaign will progress much more rapidly and generate greater interest if you then succeed in securing either from a private individual or group or from your school administration the promise that they will match the funds raised. In my case, the University agreed to match the monies contributed by the community. I advertised my fund-raising drive by stressing the availability of matching funds. My theme was "Double Your Money." The brochure describing our program and the matching-funds drive was distributed throughout the com-

munity with a card and envelope for the donor's contribution. All contributions are tax-deductible.

Ask community groups if they will mount a fund-raising benefit. Do not overlook the Italian Trade Commissioner in your area. Every year his office sponsors several commercial exhibits to promote Italian products, and with good luck he will be happy to organize one of these events as a benefit for your program. Our enterprising trade commissioner, Dr. Antonino Azzarello, organized just such a benefit for us last June when Mario Soldati was touring the United States in conjunction with the Italian Trade Commission to promote Italian wine. The gala wine-tasting benefit with Mario Soldati, held in New Orleans' oldest and most elegant hall, was one of the social events of the year and was attended by over 2,000 people.

The third and final step in the three-step plan of action is

RECIPROCAL EFFORTS BY THE TEACHER OF ITALIAN
TO SERVE THE COMMUNITY'S NEEDS

I have reciprocated with these activities, which have been very warmly received by the community:

This past semester I taught without remuneration a course on the Italian language and culture offered free to the public. The class was held at the University from 7:30 to 9:30 Monday evenings. The forty students ranged from high school boys to a great-grandmother of 85! I used the text Italian Made Simple.

I am also available as guest speaker for women's clubs and other community groups. I find that the community is extremely interested in the Italian culture per se and enjoys an illustrated lecture.

I provide guidance and/or materials for Italian-oriented community projects. This is an area in which every one of you can contribute to service club booths at fund-raising festivals and grade school and high school fairs by providing them with suggestions and loaning them some of the Italian handcrafted items, illustrated books, posters, or other items from special collections you may have. Recently I have also been serving as consultant for an Italian-American community which is planning to teach Italian at the kindergarten, first and second grade levels.

If you are teaching Italian at a University, it is likely that Italian is not offered in the high schools of your community. Unfortunately, this is true in New Orleans. Therefore, to give high school students in our city the opportunity to study Italian as their foreign language, arrangements have been made with the University and the high schools to admit qualified high school students to our Italian language courses for full college credit at one half tuition. We have had five high school students take advantage of this unique opportunity. This is a mutually-beneficial endeavor which guarantees interest in Italian among the pool of future University students.

Lastly, I have served the community by co-founding and co-editing the Italian-American Digest, a quarterly newspaper which reaches the Italian-American community and Italophiles throughout Louisiana. It has given the Italian-Americans a new-found identity and is helping to overcome their tragic feeling of inferiority and to awaken in them a long-overdue sense of pride in their Italian heritage.

In conclusion, the results the above steps achieved in nine months are:

A chair in Italian

An additional professor of Italian

Enrollment in Italian has tripled and we are assured of continuing to attract new students to our program

Donations of 250 Italian books

A $2,000 contribution for the purchase of Italian books

A fellowship for graduate students in Italian

An honorary award for the top graduating major in Italian

and equal in importance to all the above results,

The community as a whole and especially the Italian-American community now feels a close association and strong identification with the Italian program they have insured at Tulane University.

Guaranteed success in this three-step plan requires two, indispensible attributes which you must have. "Faint heart never won fair lady," and you will not achieve the above goals unless you are totally dedicated to their fulfillment. Such

dedication must be accompanied by an enormous amount of energy to sustain you through the extra work load and hours demanded by this program. I hasten to add, however, that your dedication and efforts are fully compensated by the joy and satisfaction which come from having perpetuated and revitalized the appreciation of Italy's rich cultural heritage on your campus and in your community.

If I can be of further assistance in helping you to attain these mutual goals, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Paper presented at December, 1974
MLA/AATI meeting in New York City.